

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2542

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TELAVIV

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 10339

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,UR,US,XF

SUBJECT: CURRENT USSR VIEWS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

REF: MOSCOW 5836; MOSCOW 8864; MOSCOW 9959

1. SUMMARY. SINCE THE SOVIET FAILURE TO ACHIEVE A CONSENSUS ON GENEVA LAST SPRING, MOSCOW HAS REMAINED ON THE MIDDLE EAST SIDELINES. WHILE WASHINGTON'S NEW INITIATIVES IN THE AREA EFFECTIVELY PREEMPTED THE CENTER STAGE, FIRST BY ANNOUNCING
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A REASSESSMENT OF AMERICA'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND THEN BY

REVIVING EFFORTS TO FOSTER A SECOND SINAI DISENGAGEMENT, THE SOVIET HAVE STEADFASTLY KEPT THEIR HEADS DOWN AND PURSUED A POLICY OF CAUTION AND RESTRAINT.

2. DESPITE THE SOVIETS' LOW PROFILE, HOWEVER, MOSCOW HAS TRIED TO BUILD FUTHER ON ITS LAST ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST STATES. IT HAS PURSUED AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATING PROCESS THROUGH A BALANCE OF INDUCEMENTS AND PRESSURES ON THE MIDDLE EAST PARTIES DESIGNED TO MOVE THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS TOWARD THE GENEVA FORUM WHERE MOSCOW SEES ITS CO-CHAIRMANSHIP AS THE KEY TO A SOVIET VOICE IN RESOLVING THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY.

3. ALTHOUGH RECENT SOVIET MIDDLE EAST ACTIVITY HAS PRODUCED NOTHING OF MAJOR PUBLIC INTEREST SINCE GROMYKO'S SPEECH FOR SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM IN APRIL (MOSCOW 5836), FURHTER EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO STRENGTHEN MOSCOW'S IMAGE AS A FORCE FOR "MODERATION" AND ACCOMMODATION ON MIDDLE EAST AFFAIRS AND TO UNDERLINE SOVIET "FLEXIBILITY" ON THE MODALITIES OF FURTHER MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS. SOVIET STATEMENTS HAVE THUS REAFFIRMED BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY THEIR OFFER OF RELIABLE "GUARANTEES" FOR ISRAEL'S 1957 FRONTIERS. IN RETURN, ISRAEL HAS BEEN ASKED TO ACCEPT A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT PROVIDING FOR THE RETURN OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE PALESTINIANS' RIGHT TO FORM A STATE. ALTHOUGH THIS LINE ADDS NOTHING TO EARLIER SOVIET FORMULAS, ITS CONSTANT REPETITION IS PART OF AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE SOVIETS' "MODERATE" FORMULA CONSTANTLY BEFORE WORLD OPINION AND TO BOLSTER FURTHER THE USSR'S CREDENTIALS FOR "IMPARTIALITY" IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.

4. THE SAME APPROACH HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN MOSCOW'S HANDLING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, WHERE THE SOVIETS HAVE SOUGHT TO PROJECT A POSTURE OF ACCOMMODATION ON MOST OF THE ISSUES WHICH STILL LEAVE THE ULTIMATE RECONVENING OF THE MEPC IN DOUBT. IN THIS CONNECTION, MOSCOW HAS RECNTLY SUGGESTED INCREASED FLEXIBILITY ABOUT THE APPROACHES WHICH MIGHT BE USED AT GENEVA TO ARRIVE AT A SETTLEMENT.

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SPECIFICALLY, MIDDLE EAST SPECIALIST YE. PRIMAKOV TOLD A RADIO AUDIENCE ON JUNE 29 THAT MOSCOW'S POSITION ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS DOES NOT PRECLUDE A PHASED APPROACH TOWARD AN ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT UNDER GENEVA'S AUSPICES. HE THUS PUBLICLY SAID WHAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE ONLY TO SURMISE FROM PRIVATE STATEMENTS; THAT MOSCOW MIGHT CONSIDER A "STEP-BY-STEP" APPROACH TOWARD SETTLEMENT ACCEPTABLE, PROVIDING IT IS PURSUED WITHIN THE GENEVA FRAMEWORK. THE

SOVIETS' DECISION TO MAKE THIS VIEW EXPLICIT PROBABLY REFLECTS AN EFFORT TO INDUCE WASHINGTON AND ISRAEL TO ACCEPT GENEVA WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY SEEKING TO NEUTRALIZE AMERICAN AND ISRAELI OBJECTIONS TO A GENERAL CONFERENCE APPROACH.

5. MOSCOW HAS BEEN SIMILARLY CIRCUMSPECT AND SEEMINGLY MORE WILLING TO EXPRESS FLEXIBLE VIEWS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT THE MEPC. ALTHOUGH SOVIET SPOKESMEN STILL AFFIRM MOSCOW'S VIEW THAT THE PLO SHOULD PARTICIPATE AT THE CONFERENCE FROM THE BEGINNING, SOVIET OFFICIALS HAVE CONSCIOUSLY UNDERCUT THIS POSITION BY SUGGESTING THAT THERE ARE MANY POSSIBLE WAYS IN WHICH THIS ISSUE MIGHT BE RESOLVED. (E.G., MFA DEPUTY CHIEF NEAR EAST COUNTRIES DIVISION PYRILIN ON JUNE 24 SUGGESTED FIVE POSSIBLE FORMULAS TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION, MOSCOW 8864) AT THE SAME TIME THE SOVIETS HAVE STATED THAT THE QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION IS A MATTER FOR THE ARAB STATES TO RESOLVE AND THAT THEY WILL GO ALONG WITH ANY SOLUTION AGREED ON BY THE ARABS. ALSO IN LINE WITH MOSCOW'S BALANCING ACT, WE THINK, IS SOVIET RELUCTANCE SO FAR TO SURFACE PUBLICLY THE ISSUE OF MOVES BY THE ARABS AND NON-ALIGNED TO EXPEL ISRAEL FROM THE UNITED NATIONS (E.G., IZVESTIYA'S REPORT JULY 22 ON THE ISLAMIC SUMMIT (SEPTEL) DID NOT MENTION THE RESOLUTION CALLING ON MEMBERS TO PRESS FOR ACTION AGAINST ISRAEL AT THE UN).

6. FINALLY, DESPITE THE SOVIETS' PERSISTENT REJECTION OF EFFORTS TO REACH "PARTIAL AGREEMENTS" ON THE MIDDLE EAST OUTSIDE THE GENEVA FRAMEWORK, SOVIET REACTION TO THE CURRENT SINAI DISENGAGEMENT TALKS HAS BEEN REASONABLY MUTED. PUBLIC COMMENTS CRITICAL OF THE U.S. ROLE IN REVIVING THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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ALMOST NIL, AND WHERE CRITICISM OF "STEP-BY-STEP" OUPLOMACY HAS APPEARED, ISRAEL HAS RECEIVED THE BRUNT OF MOSCOW'S REPROACHES. ALTHOUGH THIS LINE WAS PROBABLY ADOPTED BECAUSE OF THE GENERALLY HELD BELIEF THAT THERE IS LITTLE THE SOVIETS CAN DO TO ABORT OR FOSTER A NEW AGREEMENT, IT MAY ALSO SOMEWHAT REFLECT THE VIEW THAT ANOTHER DISENGAGEMENT COULD BE USEFUL IN ENHANCING THE POSSIBILITY THAT GENEVA WILL BECOME A REALITY. THE RELATIVE ABSENCE OF CRITICISM ABOUT U.S. MEDIATION EFFORTS MAY ALSO BE CALCULATED TO SUPPORT A SOVIET INTEREST IN AVOIDING A POSTURE WHICH WOULD COMPLICATE MOSCOW'S DESIRE FOR JOINT SOVIET-U.S. ACTION ON THE MIDDLE EAST, AND IN OTHER UNRELATED AREAS AS WELL, AFTER A DECISION ON THE CURRENT SINAI ROUND IS REACHED.

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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AMEMBASSY TEL AVAV
USMISSION USUN

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7. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, THE SOVIETS HAVE, WE
THINK, SOUGHT TO COUNTERPOSE THE ABOVE "INDUCEMENTS,"
PRIMARILY DIRECTED AT ISRAEL AND THE U.S., WITH INCREASED
PRESSURES ON THE MIDDLE EAST PARTIES TO IMPEL THEM TOWARD
THE CONFERENCE TABLE. PONOMAREV'S TRIP TO SYRIA IN JUNE
SHOULD PROBABLY BE SEEN LARGELY IN THIS CONTEXT. EGYPT,
WHICH IS CONSIDERED BY THE KREMLIN AS THE MAIN OBSTACLE
TO AN ARAB CONSENSUS ON GENEVA, HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TOO
CONTINUING DIRECT AND INDIRECT PRESSURES FROM OSCOW. AS
FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, THERE HAS BEEN NO SUBSTANTIAL
PROGRESS IN RESCHEDULING EGYPT'S SOVIET DEBT, AND MOSCOW
HAS APPARENTLY CONTINUED TO DENY SADAY ANY CONSESSIONS
ON EGYPT'S DEMANDS FOR ARMS. SOVIET DISPLEASURE HAS ALSO
BEEN MADE CLEAR BY THE APPARENT INDEFINITE POSTPONEMENT
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OF GROMYKO'S ABORTED VISIT TO CAIRO AND THE SHELVEING OF BREZHNEV'S MIDDLE EAST TRIP. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE SOVIET HAVE, AS IN PRAVDA'S ATTACK ON THE EGYPTIAN PRESS (MOSCOW 9959), ATTACKED EGYPT'S POLICIES FRONTALLY ALTHOUGH THE PROPAGANDA MACHINE HERE HAS REFRAINED FROM OPENLY ATTACKING SADAT IN PRINT.

8. INDIRECTLY TOO THE SOVIETS HAVE SOUGHT TO KEEP SADAT'S FEET TO THE FIRE BY IMPLICITLY WARNING AGAINST FURTHER AVOIDANCE OF A CONFRONTATION OF THE "CORE ISSUES" OF A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. RECENT SOVIET PUBLIC TREATMENT OF THE ME, FOR EXAPMLE, HAS FREQUENTLY HIGHLIGHTED THE CENTRAL POSTION WHICH RESOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM HAS IN ACHIEVING A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. MOSCOW HAS ALSO OSTENTATIUSLY WARMED ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH LIBYA AND RECENTLY HAS MOVED WITH LESS FANFARE TO IMPROVE THE SOVIETS' BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH OTHER STATES ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT (E.G., THE SOVIETS HAVE OFFERED A MAJOR ARMS DEAL TO SAANA, WAGED A PRESS CAMPAIGN TO SUGGEST IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH IRAQ, AND WITH THE VISIT OF SUDAN'S CHIEF OF STAFF MAY BE NEGOTIATING AN ARMS DEAL WITH THE SUDAN). WHILE THERE ARE CERTAINLY OBVIOUS SOVIET BILATERAL INTERESTS TO BE SERVED THROUGH EACH OF THESE MOVES, IT ALSO APPEARS THAT THEIR EFFORTS TO TAKE STEPS TOWARD THIS END DURING THE PRESENT ROUND OF EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS IS NO ACCIDNET OF TIMING.

9. WHAT ALL THIS ADDS UP TO, WE THINK, IS EVIDNECE THAT THE SOVIETS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT PROTECTING AND STABILIZING THEIR MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENTS MUST NOT CONFLICT WITH PURSUIT OF THEIR OTHER FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES, MOST NOTABLY THE RELAXATION OF TENSIONS IN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN RELATIONS, AND THAT THE BEST WAY TO BRING THIS ABOUT IS BY ACHIEVING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT PROCESS THROUGH THE MEPC. HOWEVER, A KEYSTONE SUPPORTING THIS POLICY HAS BEEN AND REMAINS MOSCOW'S ASSESSMENT THAT THE U.S. IS WILLING TO HONOR THE "AGREEMENT" TO ACT JOINTLY WITH THE USSR IN ACHIEVING A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS WILL BE EXPECTING A CLEAR INDICATION ABOUT

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U.S. PLANS FOR RESUMPTION OF GENEVA OR ABOUT OTHER POSSIBLE "JOINT" APPROACHES TOWARD THE MIDDLE EAST AT

THE UPCOMING SUMMIT IN HELSINKI.
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